

Spies, Intrigue And High Life

By Helen Thomas

United Press International

A redhaired, liberated Wichita, Kan., woman has written a book which may shake the smug world of the diplomat's wife.

She is Kathleen Troutman, wife of Reuters correspondent Robert Troutman, whose book "Spies Behind the Pillars, Bandits at the Pass" will hit stands early in March.

Her publisher, David McKay, talked her out of entitling her book "The Ambassador's Wife Smokes Pot" and helped her to "water down" some of the juicier passages about life in Afghanistan where she spent a year while her husband was a United States information Service (USIS) officer in the embassy in Kabul.

In many ways her memoirs of her diplomatic days in Central Asia during the mid-60s could be a sequel to "The Ugly American."

"It's really about a lady and her cook," says the 39-year-old author, who found her outspoken ways at diplomatic dinner parties could cause consternation.

Called "Katie" by all her friends, the author's vivid account of spies, intrigue, and the high life behind the high brick walls in Afghanistan and the caste system among the diplomat's wives, depending on their husbands' status, is an unforgettable contribution to the study of sagging U.S. prestige abroad.

Mrs. Troutman got a lot of help in writing her book from her two sons, Max, 13 and Karl, 11, who roamed the streets of Kabul at will with their slingshots — like the native boys — much to

the astonishment of other Foreign Service wives who protected their youngsters from similar human contacts.

It was the two boys who often brought home to her the depth of the poverty, and yet the ingenuity of the people to survive.

Her husband, Bob, has "always been very supportive," she said. "I'm lucky. He encouraged me to write the book and egged me on."

She said her husband "never sat on me" when her frank comments caused raised eyebrows in embassy salons.

She also was prompted to write the book by several eminent journalists for whom she acted as tour guide to the Khyber Pass.

"I've had a checkered career," she said. She attended the University of Kansas for two years, then traveled around the country from campus to campus in behalf of the Sigma Kappa sorority.

During her husband's newspaper career she lived in Toledo, Ohio, when he worked for The Blade, and in Kentucky where he was a reporter for The Louisville Courier-Journal.

She's dividing her time now between raising her family, including the boys and Samantha, 2½, and writing.

She began her career by writing for children's magazines.

She is now embarked on a new book and insists this time she will stay with her own title, which is:

"On Being Forty."